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ABSTRACT

Based on a review of 500 sources dealing with change, this presentation sets forth the practical applications of change literature for school administrators. The report concludes that change is a term neither commonly used nor commonly understood, and that ther e exist few scientifically developed (i.e., theoretically based and empirically tested and revised) tools to operationalize change. The presentation provides a realistic focus on various suggestions, prescriptions, and models for bringing about change in local school districts. (Related documents are EA 002 947 and EA 002 949). (Author)

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CHANGE LITERATURE AND THE PRACTICING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR*

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The past decade has witnessed a profusion of writings addressed to change in education and a substantial increase in the number of projects designed to effect educational change. There exist, however, few scientifically developed (i.e., theoretically based, empirically tested and revised) tools for use in the task of administering change. The promise of educational change has not been fulfilled in reality. In this paper, possible reasons for this state of affairs are explored. The discussion attempts to join knowledge of the change literature, obtained through an analysis of approximately five hundred sources dealing with the topic,[1] with knowledge of the educational setting.

The overarching observation is that the practicing school administrator can find very little practical help in the literature for planning and managing, and dealing with problems of change. The literature, for the most part, portrays change as a novel event interposed between periods of organizational stability. The practicing school administrator, on the other hand, does not have the luxury of viewing change as a novel event. He is daily involved in crisis

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[1]Louis M. Maguire, Observations and Analysis of the Literature on Change (Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools, Inc., In Press).

decision-making, which entails making the best of a set of less-than-satisfactory decisions. He must solve the plethora of immediate, non-postponable problems if he is to survive.

A more detailed discussion of underlying observations follows:

1. Conceptual confusion. There is widespread conceptual confusion in the literature on change which has resulted from various writers using the same term to refer to different things and using different terms to refer to the same thing. Diffusion, dissemination, model, change, innovation, strategy, and tactics are a few of the terms which are frequently used in this manner. Moreover, in delineating the various phases in the change process, many writers tend to focus on a segment of the change process without indicating which segment is being explicated and/or imply that all segments are being explicated when, in point of fact, they are not.

Therefore, the practicing administrator who wishes to benefit from the insights of various writers faces the burdensome and time-consuming task of translating these insights into a common language that is meaningful to him. He is also frequently in the position of trying to use what he has read only to find out that what was read is not what the writer meant. When joined with the immense quantity and inconsistent nature of literature on change, these factors effectively preclude widespread utilization of the literature by practitioners.

2. Goals and objectives. The importance of defining goals and structuring objectives and of relating change projects to the goals and objectives is agreed upon. However, the feasibility of doing so in actual change projects is open to question. Most school districts do

not now have goals and objectives which unequivocally provide direction for change activities, or have stated their goals and objectives in a way that prohibits such direction. Existing goals and objectives are generally unassailable, but not very helpful (Is creating a mirage of consensus helpful?). Moreover, there is frequently a conflict between the avowed goals and objectives of a school district and the current activities of the district. In other words, if the goals and objectives were to be derived solely from the current activities of the district, the result would probably indicate that what the district says it is trying to accomplish is vastly different from what its activities are accomplishing. While such an exercise would produce clear and operational statements of objectives, it would also probably create enough conflict to endanger the continued operation of the district.

To give a specific example of the implications of the issue under discussion, consider the application of "systems analysis" to problems of change, an approach recommended by many writers. To utilize this approach, the boundaries of the system have to be defined. A major part of the definition is the delineation of the goals and objectives of the system. Now, if the goals and objectives of a school district are accepted as is, a distorted and ambiguous picture of the district arises. If the goals and objectives are derived from the current activities of the district, the intended functioning and the actual functioning have still to be reconciled. For these reasons, "systems analysis" may be helpful for promoting problem awareness, but its usefulness for solving problems in the ongoing operations of school districts is limited.

The point being made here is that while the task of defining meaningful goals and structuring operational objectives should be of paramount concern to the practitioner, the relative ease of doing so should not be overemphasized. The political considerations involved in this task are immense.

3. Statement of problems. If a school district is considering a change, then there should be a problem, which derives from an unsatisfied need, the change is supposed to solve. The literature says define this problem before you move ahead. The difficulty with such advice is that there is usually little agreement as to what the real problem is, over time or at a certain point in time. Furthermore, because of the increasing interdependency of relationships (more will be said about this later), a school district may be able only to solve the symptom, not the problem. There is also the question of who defines the problem. What people at one level may consider to be a problem, those at the next higher level may regard as a symptom.

The purport of this discussion is to signify both the importance and difficulties of accurately and adequately defining problems before efforts are directed at problem resolution.

4. Democracy and planned change. As a general rule, people resent having their activities consciously planned, arranged or manipulated by others when they have no voice in such planning, arranging or manipulating. On the other hand, the failure to plan, arrange or manipulate effectively counteracts any movement toward attaining a higher level of effectiveness for it is only by such planning, arranging or manipulating, happenstance excluded, that this higher level is attained.

The paradox that obtains here can be resolved only by devising and utilizing structures and mechanisms which elicit freedom of expression and conflict among competing interests and which resolve such conflict before change decisions are made. People must have a voice in change decisions before they are made, and the decisions must be based upon consideration of these competing voices. Planned change can be achieved only when control of designated activities is accomplished, and in a "democratic" society this means having an elaborate schema for consultation and conflict resolution.

5. The school district as a target or initiator of planned change. Related to the seeming conflict between democracy and planned change is the issue of whether school districts should be the targets or initiators of planned change. In fact, this issue is the same as the previous one, but here it is viewed from a specific perspective. A glib answer to this question is both: school districts should be both the targets and initiators of planned change.

Such an answer, however, effectively begs the question. The purport of the issue is that school districts can expect an increasing amount of pressure of a more sophisticated variety to be placed upon them to change in specified ways. They will have to, therefore, become more sophisticated at relating to other institutions, agencies, and groups if they are to be initiators of planned change.

6. Internal and external linkage. It is clear that the interdependency of all institutions, agencies, and groups within and related to the educational enterprise will increase to an appreciable extent. For the local school district, this means that it must devise

mechanisms for becoming more attuned to what is going on outside and inside its boundaries. (Part of the boundary problem has already been mentioned, but consider, for example, if new militant student or community groups are inside or outside that boundary.) What the full complement of these external and internal linkages will look like is not yet known, but efforts must be directed at structuring these relationships.

There is some evidence to indicate that organizations which are highly interdependent are also more innovative. This same evidence suggests, however, that high interdependency creates problems for the organization, such as an increase in problems of internal coordination.[2]

The local school district can expect to be less insulated, whether voluntarily or not, from other organizations which have related concerns. Whether the attendant problems of such interdependency will outweigh the potentially beneficial results remains to be seen.

7. Change capability. Most of the literature is addressed to how school districts can take on discrete changes such as team teaching, programmed instruction, non-gradedness and modular scheduling. While such efforts are to be applauded, they have limited potential for eliciting movement toward and gaining acceptance of change as a routine occurrence. Moreover, they suffer from a false assumption: namely, that school districts are capable of planning, introducing, installing and managing discrete changes in a manner that (a) protects the integrity of the change; (b) is suited to the individual conditions obtaining in the district; (c) resolves conflict over the proposed

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[2]Michael Aiken and Jerald Hage, "Organizational Structure and Interorganizational Dynamics" (revised version of a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, August, 1967).

change and its implementation; (d) results in an improved state of performance; (e) does not prematurely prompt nor unnecessarily delay acceptance of the change; and (f) does not preclude consideration of other changes. The high incidence of non-utilized and subverted change belies this assumption.

Therefore, efforts to enhance or improve the change capability of school districts as a prerequisite for taking on discrete changes become of signal importance. In addition to, and possibly more important than, urging school districts to adopt team teaching, programmed instruction, non-gradedness, modular scheduling, etc., efforts should be directed at enabling a school district to determine where change is desirable and necessary; to define its problems; to assess and utilize the resources both within and outside its boundaries for solving its problems; to invent or adapt solutions to its problems; and to plan, introduce, install and manage the solutions in an effective, efficient and further change-inducing manner. More concern has recently been devoted to such efforts (e.g., Miles' concept of organizational health,[3] Gardner's concept of self-renewal,[4] and Cooperative Project for Educational Development activities[5]), but the actual efforts have not passed an embryonic state.

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[3]Matthew B. Miles, "Planned Change and Organizational Health: Figure and Ground," Change Processes in the Public Schools, Richard O. Carlson, et al. (Eugene, Oreg.: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon, 1965), pp. 11-34.

[4]John W. Gardner, Self-Renewal (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

[5]Goodwin Watson (ed.), Change in School Systems, Cooperative Project for Educational Development (Washington, D. C.: National Training Laboratories, National Education Association, 1967); and Goodwin Watson (ed.), Concepts for Social Change, Cooperative Project for Educational Development (Washington, D. C.: National Training Laboratories, National Education Association, 1967).

The main point being made here is that a school district's capability to become aware of the need for and to plan and manage discrete changes is currently very limited. Therefore, the major change that is needed is a change in such capability or capacity.

8. Maintenance or improvement. It is generally agreed that the paramount functions of administration are to maintain the organization's existence and to improve the organization.

Now, the status of the educational enterprise is such that the only way to maintain it is to improve it, or at least to give the appearance of improvement. Therefore, within the educational enterprise can be seen an immense amount of change activity and an even greater amount of talk about change. The motivation for much of this activity and talk seems to refer to the maintenance aspect. In other words, schools are attempting to change because that is the only way to remain in existence. This produces change for change's sake. The message here is that change must be based on a desire to improve, not maintain, the school district. Ill-motivated changes are seldom long-lasting or wholesome.

This issue is doubly confounded by the fact that the pivotal function of the school is changing from social maintenance to social improvement. Most of the literature seems to be predicated upon the assumption of the school as a vehicle of social maintenance. Schools are, or should be viewed as, vehicles of social improvement, but most of the change literature does not reflect this viewpoint.

It can also be said that traditional administrative arrangements in education were, and are, almost exclusively geared to performing the

maintenance function. It is now time to consider how administration can be structured, or restructured if you will, to perform the improvement function (see previous discussion of change capability). This is not to say that the maintenance function should be neglected, but only that the improvement function should be given preeminence.

9. Change models. It is recommended that practitioners who are responsible for change projects select and consciously follow an appropriate change model. However, the practitioner who would follow such advice faces the task of deciding which, if any, of the differential formulations of existing change models is appropriate for his situation. A prerequisite for the successful completion of this task is the recognition that existing models do not all speak to the exact same issue. The practitioner must also decide whether the models are describing what is or what should be. Most of the models have varying degrees of abstractness, relate to change problems at different levels and from different perspectives, cover different variables, and have varying degrees of completeness. For example, the Clark-Guba model looks at the problem of educational change on a national level from the perspective of a researcher and considers adoption of innovations by practitioners as the final phase in the process. Rogers' diffusion model attempts to portray how an innovation diffuses to a wide potential audience. The Lippitt-Watson-Westley model attempts to emphasize how internal needs and resources can be marshalled to solve a problem.

Given the amount of effort they must put forth in selecting an appropriate change model, it is doubtful that practitioners regard change models as being of much benefit to them. Their problems in following a model are left to the imagination.

10. Phases of change. The literature abounds with various formulations of the change process. Each of these formulations has its strengths and weaknesses, depending upon the perspective of the reader. A general weakness that applies to most of them is that they seem to view, or at least report, change as a formal, rational process. While this is fine as a guide to change, the informal, non-rational aspects of the process should not be neglected or underemphasized by practitioners. Such neglect or underemphasis can effectively preclude attainment of the objective of a change project.

11. Roles in change. There exists no standard role structure for change in education. On the one hand, it is averred that teachers and administrators can and should perform as advocates of change. On the other hand, it is stated that teachers and administrators are not and can not be advocates of change. Whether the cause or result of such conflicting viewpoints, the inauthentic, goal-displaced, bureaucratic role behavior which is so rampant in education is a crucial factor in solving the issue. It is evident that a complete restructuring of roles is needed if such behavior is to be avoided in the future.

12. Crisis as a stimulus to change. The literature is replete with suggestions and lists of factors that can prompt change. Crisis is sometimes mentioned, but it is hardly ever emphasized. However, events occurring in the day-to-day world of the administrator reveal that crisis is one of the main factors prompting change. In fact, the school environment can aptly be described as a crisis environment. Parents, taxpayers, community groups, governmental agencies and students are emphasizing that they will not permit the school to function as it

has functioned in the past. It is instructive to note that the major impetus for crisis decision-making comes not from within the school, but from forces which have traditionally been viewed as external to the school.

The import of this issue is that the crisis environment in education will increase, probably with renewed vigor. How to handle a crisis situation, or better yet how to prevent the constant reoccurrence of crisis, is a question that is shrouded in doubt and mystery.

What has been said under this issue should not be taken as implying that crisis is inherently bad for an organization or that crisis is dysfunctional for a local school district. In fact, it is recognized that some practitioners regard crisis as a tested and necessary means for inducing change. It is posited, however, that crisis affords few long-term solutions.

13. Lack of training. Most of the approaches recommended in the literature necessitate the performance of new skills in such areas as comprehensive planning, project management, program development and selection, evaluation, needs assessment, large-scale consultation, community interface, decentralization, knowledge utilization, problem solving, diffusion, change agentry, educational engineering, conflict resolution, etc., from the superintendent to the teacher and pupil. These approaches call for retraining on a massive scale. However, few formal training programs for these skills exist. Currently such training as exists is on an ad hoc basis, but if training remains on this basis, the potential for improvement will remain just that, namely potential. It may be premature to construct a curriculum for these

skills because few of the skills have been operationally defined, but it is not premature to consider the nature and source of the training.

Optimistically, it could be hoped that universities, in conjunction with practitioners, will establish and provide such programs. It is the author's bias that such a hope is too optimistic and that practitioners can expect little from universities as institutions in meeting new training needs. These training needs will probably have to be met in new and different ways, and this does not mean having a group of distinguished scholars speak at a series of lectures. Consortiums of school districts might be a possible source for these training needs. New approaches will need to be discussed.

Summary. In an attempt to join knowledge of the change literature with knowledge of the educational setting, some of the underlying generalizations of why the promise of educational change has not been fulfilled in reality have been presented under the headings of conceptual confusion; goals and objectives; statement of problem; democracy and planned change; the school district as a target or initiator of planned change; internal and external linkage; change capability; maintenance or improvement; change models; phases of change; roles in change; crisis as a stimulus to change; and lack of training. The overarching observation is that in its present state and form the literature contains little that is readily and dependably usable by the practicing school administrator in the task of administering for change.

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